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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8921

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5014

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2453

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1811

RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3793

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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000893

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS  
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/06/2018

TAGS: PGOV KDEM KISL ID

SUBJECT: MIXED FORTUNES FOR TWO ISLAMIC PARTIES

REF: A. JAKARTA 801

1B. JAKARTA 488 AND PREVIOUS

JAKARTA 00000893 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Islamic-oriented PKS party unofficially kicked off its 2009 election campaign with a 10th anniversary celebration on May 4 attended by over 100,000 revelers. President Yudhoyono and other 2009 presidential hopefuls attended, all vying for PKS support. Meanwhile, another Islamic party is not faring so well: the PKB party of former president Wahid (aka "Gus Dur") has continued to fracture. While the PKB sinks, the PKS event demonstrates the party's growing importance on the political scene. END SUMMARY.

PKS CELEBRATES

12. (U) The Islamic-oriented Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) threw itself a 10th birthday party on May 4 at Jakarta's Senayan Sports Stadium, attended by over 100,000. (Note: The party was founded in 1998 shortly before the collapse of the Suharto regime.) High-level Indonesians attended, including the following declared or possible 2009 presidential candidates:

-- President Yudhoyono;  
-- former Jakarta governor Sutiyoso;  
-- Hanura Party Chair General (ret.) Wiranto; and,  
-- former Golkar Chair Akbar Tandjung.

13. (U) Commenting on the attendance of these political heavyweights, PKS chief patron Hilmy Aminuddin told the crowd, "We are open to anyone wanting to be the country's next leader." PKS President Tifatul Sembiring said: "We are open (to alliances) with any parties as long as we have the same vision. We value plurality and respect those with different beliefs." Major PKS figure and People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Speaker Hidayat Nur Wahid and the three PKS ministers in the Cabinet also attended as did many legislators and other political luminaries. In his brief

remarks, President Yudhoyono called on the rich to help the poor cope with rising fuel and food prices. (Note: PKS forms part of Yudhoyono's ruling coalition.)

¶14. (C) In a May 5 meeting with Pol/C, Umar Shihab, a senior official of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), said he had attended the event. (Note: MUI is an important Muslim body in Indonesia. Shihab is not a member of a political party.) He said he was highly impressed with PKS's ability to draw a sizable crowd and keep the event moving in terms of organization. He gave credit to its "energetic young volunteers." Shihab added that the event was "almost like a celebration of PKS by the entire body politic," which indicated that the party had moved beyond its narrow Muslim roots.

#### PKB IN THE DOLDRUMS

¶15. (SBU) Meanwhile, while PKS celebrates, another Islamic party is facing tough times. As predicted in reftels, Gus Dur's once influential National Awakening Party (PKB) has split into rival factions. The PKB Advisory Board, led by Gus Dur, recently elected Ali Masykur Musa as party chair. In reaction to this, the snubbed Party Chair Muhamaiman Iskandar, Gus Dur's nephew and Deputy Speaker of Parliament, subsequently convened a separate extraordinary meeting on May ¶14. This meeting voted to maintain Muhamaiman as chairman. The Iskandar faction also voted little-known cleric Aziz Mansyur as the party's chief patron, replacing Gus Dur. The General Election Commission has yet to rule on the dispute.

¶16. (SBU) PKB has until May 12 to close the rift or face the possibility that neither faction can compete in the 2009 elections. PKB continues to draw its support mainly from Gus Dur's strong Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) backing in East Java (ref

JAKARTA 00000893 002.2 OF 002

B). (Note: NU--one of the largest Islamic groups in the world--represents many Indonesian Muslim clerics and scholars.)

#### A TALE OF TWO PARTIES

¶17. (C) Fresh off its recent victories in the West Java and North Sumatra gubernatorial races, PKS continues to gain traction. While a crowd of 100,000 in Jakarta is not bad, the real sign of the party's newfound prominence is the attendance at the event by Yudhoyono and the other presidential candidates. All of them were clearly vying for PKS support in 2009 and the party lapped that up. In the meantime, PKB's trajectory seems bleak. The party received 10 percent of the national vote in 2004, which was down from 12 percent in 1999. The recent split in the party is bound to hurt its already declining chances for 2009.

HUME